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SEAL DANGEROUS AVIATION SECURITY LOOPHOLES

Co-Sponsor H.R. 3798 – Secure Existing Aviation Loopholes (SEAL) Act

Dear Colleague:

Last week, two British Airways flights were cancelled due to terrorist concerns, and the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement reported that three Dominicans recently packed themselves in a crate and flew undetected to Miami aboard a cargo plane. This latest news follows more than two dozen terrorist threat-related flight cancellations over the winter holidays and the exploitation of the cargo screening loophole by another stowaway, who traveled from New Jersey to Texas before being discovered as he emerged from a shipping crate on his parents' doorstep.

When Homeland Security Secretary Ridge elevated the nation's threat level in December 2003 to indicate a high risk of terrorist attack, he cited intelligence on Al Qaeda efforts to use commercial aircraft to launch another 9/11-style attack against the United States. Secretary Ridge also noted that recent intelligence reports suggest that Al Qaeda continues to evaluate procedures for identifying gaps in airline security abroad that could be exploited to strike the United States. These warnings are a solemn reminder that commercial airliners remain at the top of Al Qaeda's terrorist target list.

I have introduced H.R. 3798, the Secure Existing Aviation Loopholes (SEAL), to close dangerous gaps in airline security that threaten the safety of passengers and airline crew members. The SEAL Act calls for urgently needed reforms, such as:

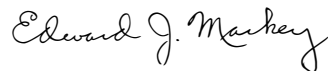
- Mandatory, physical inspection of all cargo transported on passenger airplanes
- Prohibition of foreign flights from taking off or landing in the U.S. unless air marshals of a foreign country are onboard, if requested by the Department of Homeland Security
- Authority for U.S. Federal Air Marshals to travel on cargo planes
- The requirement that the Department of Homeland Security develop a plan to improve coordination with foreign counterparts, particularly in the area of air marshals and improved perimeter security at airports abroad
- Establishment of uniform security standards for airport workers with access to sensitive areas, including screening for metal objects and hazardous substances

and background checks that verify Social Security numbers and query terrorist watch lists

- Requirement that the Department of Homeland Security issue regulations mandating that air carriers train pilots on how to maneuver passenger planes safely in the event that the plane is hit by a surface-to-air missile
- The requirement that flight attendants have a secure, wireless means to communicate to the cockpit crew, Federal Air Marshals and authorities on the ground regarding the existence of a terrorist threat, even if the intercom system is disabled

Repeated disruptions in airline service and exploitation of the cargo screening loophole have demonstrated that we must take a comprehensive approach to improving the level of security across the aviation system. The reforms described above, and others included in the SEAL Act, are aimed at closing aviation security loopholes that continue to put passengers and crew members at risk more than two years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. If you would like additional information or to co-sponsor H.R. 3798, please have a member of your staff contact Mark Bayer or Michal Freedhoff of my staff at 5-2836.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edward J. Markey".

Edward J. Markey